

A low-angle photograph of a tree trunk, showing the rough bark and the intricate network of branches. The scene is filled with autumn leaves in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The background is a clear blue sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative, reflecting the passage of time and the cycle of nature.

The Year in Review: 2004

Still caring for the land after 100 years



Randy Moore,
Regional Forester

The Eastern Region has accomplished many important projects in 2004 to improve our national forests for the people who use and depend on them. The results have been dramatic: threatened plant and animal species are recovering, recreation opportunities have never been better, forest management plans have been revised, and we've undertaken organizational changes that will make our overall service more cost effective.

Soon after the US Congress passed the "Healthy Forests Restoration Act" early in 2004, we initiated a bold five-year strategy to restore fire-adapted ecosystems on eastern national forests using new administrative tools. Our accomplishments in this area are further described on page two.

This year—as in the past—the assistance of our partners on critical projects has been invaluable. We received more than \$18 million in partnership contributions, a 60 percent increase over the past two years. These additional monies—donated by a diverse group of organizations, agencies and volunteers—helped us accomplish significant ecosystem restoration projects across the Region.

We have also continued updating our comprehensive land and resource management plans for national forests, completing three in 2004 and laying the groundwork to complete seven additional plans in 2005. These plans—which provide long-term vision and guidance for forest management—are shaped by public input, and will guide our work for years to come.

As always, we invite you again to visit our national forests, and join us in celebrating the Forest Service's rich tradition and commitment to service during our Centennial in 2005. These national forest treasures are yours to enjoy!

Randy Moore

Randy Moore

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US Department of Agriculture National Forests of the Eastern Region



Fires, Fuels and Healthy Forests

Reducing hazardous fuels and restoring forest health gained an important ally in 2004—the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. This legislation enables the Forest Service to implement projects near communities more rapidly and on a larger scale. This is particularly significant given the substantial increase in the number of seasonal homes that are on privately-owned lands within the boundaries of eastern national forests.

Using brush cutting, timber sales, and prescribed fires, we reduced concentrated vegetation that could otherwise fuel a catastrophic wildfire near communities at risk. We achieved a 75 percent greater fuels reduction than in 2003. More than 90 percent of the acres treated bordered on homes and neighborhoods.

These actions also helped restore fire-adapted ecosystems. The health of eastern forests has been diminished by the exclusion of fire, a natural process that helps to maintain desirable conditions. In 2004, we improved forest health on more than 100,000 acres—an amount far above our normal program levels. The result: healthier ecosystems and healthier forests in the East.

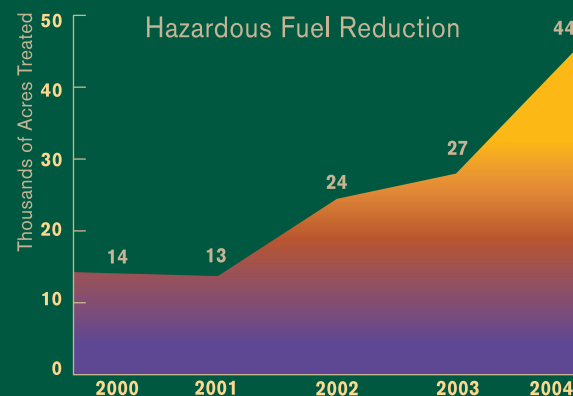
A firefighter monitors a prescribed fire in the Wayne National Forest (above).



Heather Stachler



USDA Forest Service



Ren Ausling

The Kirtland's warbler thrives in fire-dependent ecosystems.



Superior National Forest

A Canada lynx kitten, discovered in Minnesota's Superior National forest.

Tracking the Canada Lynx

We made great progress in the third year of the Minnesota Canada Lynx Study, a scientific undertaking that adds much to our knowledge of this elusive wild cat, which is a threatened species. Forest Service and university researchers captured more than a dozen Canada lynx and fitted them with transmitters that allow us to gather information about their movements, habitat use, and response to human activity. Furthermore, new DNA analysis techniques allow us to identify individual lynx, including the parents of kittens found during the study.

Forest Planning

A top priority for the Region in 2004 was to make significant progress in revising the land and resource management plans for each Eastern Region national forest. With substantial participation from the public, employees, and leadership, we are well underway. In 2004 we completed final revised plans for the Chippewa, Superior, and Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests. We published a draft environmental impact statement and a proposed revised forest plan for the White Mountain National Forest, and are now incorporating public comments in preparation for a final decision. Eleven other eastern national forests are working to complete plan revisions in fiscal years 2005 and 2006.

Forest plans conserve habitat for sensitive species, such as the woodland turtle, native to eight eastern national forests.



USDA Forest Service



US Forest Service

Flooded lands in the Middle Mississippi Purchase Unit.

Protecting Undeveloped Land

In 2004, the Eastern Region worked with local and national partners to establish a 60,000-acre Middle Mississippi Purchase Unit for the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois. Newly acquired lands in the unit will lead to the restoration of rare bottomland hardwood forests. These restored wetlands will provide high-quality habitat for waterfowl and other species; help reduce impacts of local flooding; and recharge groundwater resources.

We obtained more than 20,000 acres throughout the Region through land purchases and donations. With assistance from The Trust for Public Lands, Michigan's Ottawa National Forest acquired more than 6,000 acres of land from the International Paper Company. The land provides habitat for threatened, endangered, and rare species, and connects popular snowmobile trails.

Preserving America

In 2004, many eastern national forests participated in Preserve America, a White House initiative to protect our nation's significant historic properties by fostering heritage tourism partnerships with local communities.

Specific accomplishments include:

- The Allegheny National Forest, the Penn Lake Girl Scouts Council, and other partners rehabilitated Camp Birdsall Edey, a Girl Scout camp established in 1939.
- The Shawnee National Forest, University of Illinois Extension Service, and other partners hosted a "Share Your Heritage" workshop to develop cultural heritage tourism strategies for five southern Illinois counties.
- The Ottawa National Forest and local partners developed an interpretive heritage center at the former Bergland Ranger Station, built in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps.



Ottawa National Forest

Bergland Cultural and Heritage Center in winter.



Progress on the Prairie

A former US Army munitions site, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is a 19,000-acre prairie under construction. Restoration activities are slowly bringing the prairie back to life, and planting native vegetation is a major activity at Midewin. The year 2004 brought exciting changes to the prairie such as new temporary wetlands that provide breeding habitat for amphibians and foraging habitat for waterfowl and herons. Grassland birds, including some of the Region's rarer species, increased their use of the prairie. Just an hour's drive away from nine million people in the Chicago metropolitan area, Midewin offers a unique recreation experience.

More prairie restoration activities in 2004

- Planted wetland and prairie vegetation on 800-plus acres.
- Improved 250 acres of grassland bird habitat by converting agricultural lands into pasture.
- Initiated prairie and wetland restoration on 625 acres.
- Removed agricultural field drainage tiles, hedge rows, railroad berms.
- Filled drainage ditches.

Mola Wetlands Restoration Project at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (above).



Bill Glass



Bill Glass



Dennis Reavis

The terragator plants seeds during the winter, because it's less harmful to the wetlands.

Ribbon cutting marks opening of public lands at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.



Consumers Energy Company

The Stronach Dam as it appeared in the early 1900's.



Bob Stuber

The Pine River today, flowing freely once more.

A Tale of Two Dams

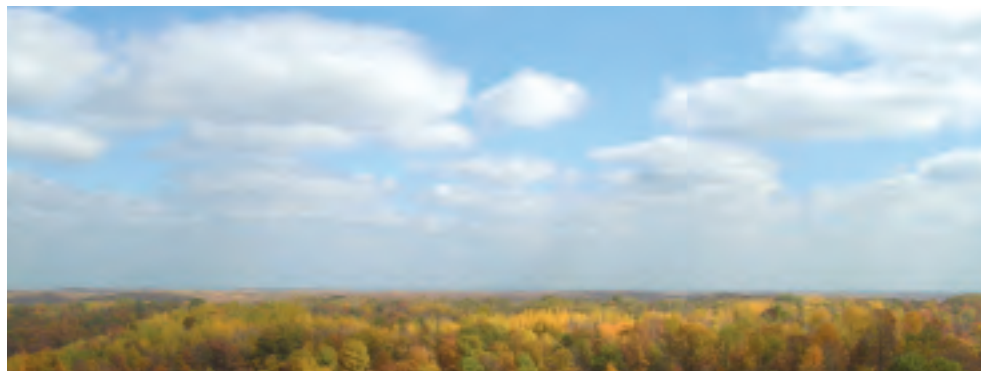
Because the Eastern Region is rich in water, with nearly half the lakes on all national forests and two million acres of wetlands, restoring watersheds is vital to the health of the Region. In 2004, two river restoration projects on two national forests helped to improve watersheds on our national forests.

Pine River Runs Through It: Stronach Dam Removal Project

The year 2004 marked completion of a six-year dam removal project that restored a stretch of the Pine River in Michigan's Huron-Manistee National Forests.

Built in 1912, the Stronach Dam was a power-producing dam until 1953 when the generators and brick powerhouse were removed. The rest of the dam was left in place as a spillway. The Forest Service partnered with Michigan's Department of Natural Resources, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Consumers Energy Company, and Michigan State University to restore the original river landscape.

A study is now underway to evaluate the changes in the Pine River as a result of the dam's removal. Early evidence shows that both fish numbers and diversity have increased upstream of the former dam. Brown trout and rainbow trout populations increased sixfold after the dam was removed, and 13 fish species—formerly only found downstream—are now found upstream from where the dam once stood.



Heather Stachler

In 2004, air pollutants were at the lowest levels since monitoring began.

Oconto River Goes with the Flow: Hemlock Dam Removal Project

The Hemlock Dam was built in 1894 to speed logs downstream to sawmills along the Menominee and Oconto Rivers, a common transportation system in Wisconsin before the advent of railroads.

What the Hemlock Dam did to make logging easier proved damaging to the Oconto. Clearing the river of wood and rocks to ease the flow of logs also removed vital habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms. Even as the dam eroded over the years, its remnants constricted the channel, causing water to pool upstream and release sediment into the river.

With major funding from Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest designed a fisheries habitat improvement project that began in July 2004. The removal of two earthen dams was the first step in the process of restoring the Oconto River to a narrower, deeper channel for cooler,

more swiftly flowing water. The River Alliance of Wisconsin and Trout Unlimited have also contributed valuable support to this river restoration effort.

Clearing the Air on National Forests

The Eastern Region has long recognized the importance of clean air to healthy forest ecosystems and to people who recreate in eastern forests. We continue to fulfill our air quality permit review responsibilities, working with the US Environmental Protection Agency and state agencies to determine the best control technology for operating permits issued to the nation's largest air pollutant sources. The result of these joint efforts has been the reduction of tens of thousands of tons of potential emissions. Significantly, fine particulate pollution levels—often the cause of respiratory and visibility effects, and acid deposits—are at their lowest levels since nationwide monitoring began in 1999.

Urban Connections

We hired a full-time urban outreach employee in Boston in 2004 to facilitate community events, organize partnerships and raise awareness of forest ecology and management and recreation opportunities among underserved groups. The Forest Service and Greenfield Village have embarked on an exciting and far-reaching partnership as part of our work in the greater Detroit metro area. Greenfield Village will help us tell the story of America's conservation movement, and help us celebrate the Forest Service Centennial in 2005.

Taking the Lead in Recreation

In 2004, the Eastern Region maintained and improved trails, campsites, picnic areas and other special places that are so important to our visitors. We continue to lead the nation in providing recreation facilities that are accessible to people of all abilities.

On Ohio's Wayne National Forest, the popular Lake Vesuvius Recreation Area reopened in June 2004 following renovation of the lakebed and construction of a 1,400-foot boardwalk accessible to all people.

Fifteen new interpretive sites along the Kancamagus Scenic Byway on New Hampshire's White Mountain National Forest help to educate visitors and improve safety awareness.

On National Public Lands Day, Regional Office employee Bonnie Ilhardt provides backpacking etiquette to interested youngsters at Lynden Hill in Milwaukee (above).



Andrew Madsen

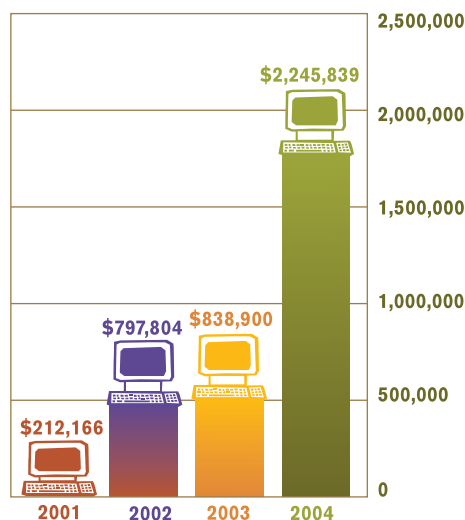


Boston-area teens enjoy the splendor of New Hampshire's White Mountain National Forest.



The new boardwalk along the Lake Vesuvius Recreation Area affords visitors of all abilities the chance to fish and enjoy the beauty of one of southern Ohio's most popular recreation destinations.

Value of computer equipment
donated to schools.



Computer Donations

Over the past few years, the Eastern Region has been working with public school districts and non-profit pre-kindergarten through 12th grade schools to donate our excess computer equipment. In 2004, 13 national forests and the Regional Office transferred ownership of more than \$2.2 million worth of laptop computers, printers, and monitors to schools with a genuine need.

Partnerships

Partners are the invaluable connection the Eastern Region has with groups and organizations that share our commitment to “caring for the land and serving people.” Financial contributions and matching funds reached new highs in 2004, enabling us to accomplish a diverse range of projects. As well as our Urban Connections outreach efforts, we worked with inner-city youth

involved in programs such as El Valor in Chicago to foster interest in natural resources at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Other notable achievements include:

- Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest worked with McKean County to secure an additional \$43,000 to prepare an environmental impact statement for the Willow Creek All-terrain Vehicle Trail.
- In Michigan’s Huron-Manistee National Forests, 105 different partners came together under a 15-year agreement to enhance wildlife, fisheries, and recreation programs on the forests.
- The Chippewa National Forest in Minnesota—along with the Cass Lake Partnership—implemented a rural economic action plan to revitalize the community through a streetscape project and interagency visitor center, both of which will increase tourism potential and expand recreation opportunities.

These and other partnerships provide resources for us to accomplish even more on-the-ground projects that will continue to benefit the American public and Eastern Region well into the future.

During the SCEP orientation, the students received an overview of the Forest Service.

Workforce Diversity

Like many other organizations, the Eastern Region will lose many skilled and experienced employees through retirement in the next five years. We are committed to developing the future leaders of the Forest Service by pursuing a highly skilled, motivated workforce that reflects the diversity of the American population through recruitment programs such as the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). This program provides exceptional undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate students with practical work experience and training tied to their primary field of study. Since 2000, 35 SCEP students have gained permanent full-time employment with the Forest Service.

The Region provides equitable access for all people to Forest Service programs and services, and further demonstrates commitment to workforce diversity through a wide range of programs—special emphasis observances, cultural education opportunities, and developing strategies and tools to remove barriers to equal opportunity.

